

DRAFT

Monday, May 19, 2008

- Require voter identification
- Clarify certain provisions of the state's new immigration
- Revise certain provisions of the state's new scrap metal law
- Allow county utility authorities in the Mississippi Gulf region to exercise the right of immediate possession for the purpose of acquiring rights-of-way for water, sewer, drainage and other public utility purposes
- Increase salaries of the elected judiciary
- Seek Senate confirmation of Governor Barbour's nomination of Billy Deviney to the Mississippi Commission on Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks
- Seeks Senate confirmation of Lt. Gov. Phil Bryant's nomination of Jimmy Heidelberg to the State Oil and Gas Board

GOVERNOR BARBOUR SETS SPECIAL SESSION FOR MAY 21, 2008

Jackson, Mississippi – Governor Haley Barbour has called Mississippi lawmakers to the State Capitol for a Special Session convening at 1 p.m. on Wednesday, May 21, 2008, to consider a number of specific subjects.

"I have determined that each of these subjects requires immediate attention and it is in the public interest to go ahead and deal with them in a Special Session," Governor Barbour said. "While each requires that important decisions be made I hope this session can be done in an expedient manner."

The agenda, or "call," currently includes the following but is likely to be expanded by early next week:

- Reauthorize the Mississippi Department of Employment Security
- Provide funding to fill a hole in the Mississippi Medicaid program
- Adopt a moratorium on the expansion of gaming beyond counties that either now have it or have approved it
- Authorize construction of a toll road connecting downtown Jackson to Jackson International Airport
- Fix flaws in a metal recycling bill (HB 1136) that was vetoed on May 12.

In issuing the call, Governor Barbour outlined his reasons for including each of these subjects:

Mississippi Department of Employment Security

“Failure of the Legislature to reauthorize the Mississippi Department of Employment Security will severely hurt our state and many citizens. If this indefensible lack of action – caused by some in the House of Representatives pushing an issue which has nothing to do with operations of this vital department of state government – were to stand, unemployed Mississippians can not receive their benefits; businesses will see their unemployment insurance tax rates dramatically multiply; and the State will lose millions of dollars in federal grants.

“MDES has an annual budget of \$218 million, including approximately \$28 million in federal unemployment insurance and Wagner Peyser grants that come through MDES to help our citizens. These funds cover such costs as processing claims, collecting unemployment insurance taxes from employers, and the resolution of appeals. These funds are used at the state’s WIN job centers to help people find jobs. More than 700 employees at MDES work to provide a variety of workforce employment and training services, including the administration of over \$48 million in workforce investment dollars this year.

“The Legislature’s failure to act hits hardest, first, at the very people least able to take the blow, that is unemployed Mississippians whose benefits would not be paid. Secondly, the state’s employers, most of them small businesses, would be faced with an eight-fold increase in the Federal Unemployment Tax Act rate from .8% to 6.2%. The usual FUTA credit of 5.4% for all Mississippi employers will be denied, resulting in a \$409 million tax increase on Mississippi’s employers.

“The Mississippi Department of Employment Security has been recognized as among the top employment service agencies in the nation due to the effective, efficient manner in which it delivers services. It would be unthinkable for Mississippi’s employers to have to pay hundreds of millions of dollars in taxes or for beneficiaries to be denied services because MDES is hamstrung with a totally unrelated issue.”

Medicaid

“The funding shortfall in Medicaid has been well documented, and I am confident all parties want to achieve a resolution to this important issue. After consultation with the Division of Medicaid, the Medical Hospital Advisory Board I recently appointed, legislators, and other interests, we will come forward with a specific plan to remedy the shortfall.”

Gaming

“It is time to close the window on the expansion of gaming in Mississippi. As I have said from the beginning of my first campaign, I am opposed to the expansion of gaming beyond counties that either have it or have approved it. After nearly 16 years of legalized gaming in Mississippi I believe qualifying counties who want gaming already have it.”

Airport toll road

“There are tremendous energy-saving, transportation, and economic benefits to construction of a toll road connecting downtown Jackson with the Jackson International Airport. This project will give the traveling public another option as it will re-direct traffic from an already-crowded Lakeland Drive or the circuitous I-55/I-20 route to the airport. Under the public-private partnership I am proposing this project could also become a national model for completing a major, beneficial highway construction project in only a few short years.”

Metal recycling

“When I vetoed HB 1136 on May 12, I said the theft of metals, especially copper, is a major problem in Mississippi that must be addressed. Metal thefts from individual homes, businesses, and public property have resulted in considerable economic losses.

“I support harsher penalties for those convicted of stealing metals, and I support more restrictive laws that discourage the trade of illegal metals in Mississippi. However, in regulating metals commerce, we should acknowledge that the metals industry employs thousands of Mississippians and to penalize many legitimate businesses for the bad actions of others is poor policy and unfair.

“While I agree with the intent of House Bill 1136, I believe that the prescribed remedy was massive overregulation that is potentially damaging to many legitimate businesses.

“Because of the urgency in addressing this problem, I am proposing legislation with a goal to be both fair to our good corporate citizens and effective in discouraging metals theft.”

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